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From the Archive: Nemtsov Tells His Story in 'The Provincial Man'

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Former deputy prime minister and Union of Right Forces (SPS) presidential candidate Boris Nemtsov speaks during an interview at Echo of Moscow radio station in Moscow in this Dec. 26, 2007 photo.

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Once upon a time, a Gypsy woman met Boris Nemtsov's mother. She told her the dreamy, curly haired boy would be world famous one day.

"My mother laughed very hard. Well, if one can call this success, it has been achieved," the rising star of Russian politics writes in a new book.

At 37, Nemtsov has found himself at the top of Russian power. The former scientist was recently appointed by President Boris Yeltsin to be one of two chief deputies to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. And he is charged with the difficult task of reforming the Soviet-era energy and gas monopolies.

Nemtsov owes his fame to his years as the maverick governor of Nizhny Novgorod, a Volga River region he himself calls "a white island in a red sea" — a reference to Nizhny Novgorod's long reputation as a playground of reformers.

Nemtsov's 150-page account, "The Provincial Man," will be published in the next few days by Moscow's Vagrius publishing house.

Nemtsov wrote the book before his Kremlin appointment, and he has created a small sensation with his open criticism of Kremlin leaders.

He calls Yeltsin "a real Russian tsar ... a real Russian muzhik. On the other hand, he's quite a reckless, careless man, often brave and often sleeping like a bear."

Nemtsov says he has clashed with Yeltsin many times, including last year, when he presented the president with the signatures of 1 million people from his region against the war in Chechnya.

Chernomyrdin, according to Nemtsov, is an "honest man" but one hardly capable of being a prime minister at the time of crisis.

Nemtsov also provides some insights about himself, like how he ran away from home as a young man and lived in basements, making his living by unloading milk trucks. He calls himself "an ambitious and quite a smart man" who nevertheless tries to treat himself with irony.

Nemtsov topped the annual list of Russia's most-trusted politicians, the All-Russia Public Opinion Center said Wednesday.

Nemtsov was in a statistical dead heat with former general Alexander Lebed, a nationalist who had been considered the most popular Russian politician, and Gennady Zyuganov, the head of the resurgent Communist Party.

Among 2,400 people polled between March 14 and April 2, 18.8 percent chose Nemtsov as Russia's most trustworthy politician. Lebed was chosen by 18.6 percent, and Zyuganov by 15 percent.

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